WALHALLA GOLDFIELDS RAILWAY

Engineering Heritage Marker unveiled on 9 October 2016 by Engineering Heritage Victoria and Walhalla Goldfields Railway Inc.

ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

THE MOE TO WALHALLA RAILWAY

- a minor masterpiece of railway engineering

The Victorian Railways encountered few difficult engineering design issues on the first part of line from Erica to Moe, although a number of bridges were needed in the section. Beyond Erica, construction of the line traversed the lower part of the Baw Baw ranges and numerous bridges and cuttings were needed to achieve some of the steepest gradients and sharpest curves on any part of the Victorian railway network.

Shortly after leaving Erica Station, the railway crossed Jacobs Creek, requiring 73 metres of bridging on the highest crossing on the entire railway. The railway then descended into the Thomson Valley with two trestle bridges required just before the simple nameboard station at Thomson.

The adjacent Thomson River presented a major design challenge for the Victorian Railways, with the valley needing a crossing length of 106 metres and the ability to withstand major flood events. Planning for the bridge was constrained by available funding restrictions, and was eventually assisted by the centre lattice span being reused from a former road bridge over the Murray River at Tocumwal (NSW). The other main beams came from locations on the Melbourne-Albury railway and were also regauged to suit the narrow gauge (762mm) track specification. Site construction commenced in February 1909 and on 20 October 1909, the new bridge was tested under load with an NA class locomotive.

Once the Thomson Bridge was completed, work immediately commenced on the challenge of negotiating the deep Stringers Creek gorge into Walhalla, requiring construction of eight bridges in the section, as well as substantial sections of drystone walling which remain today.

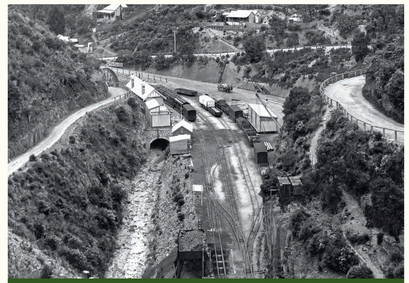
The final task was the provision of a full rail yard, station, goods shed and associated buildings in a very constrained setting at Walhalla. This was achieved by substantial cut and fill as well as construction of a tunnel over Stringers Creek, the created space of land above it being used for the station building.

The Victorian Railways required great ingenuity and design skills to construct the line in a particularly difficult and remote setting, and the scale of the work was celebrated at the time of opening. After the line was closed, all of the tracks and buildings were dismantled and the encroaching bush rapidly removed most visible traces of it.

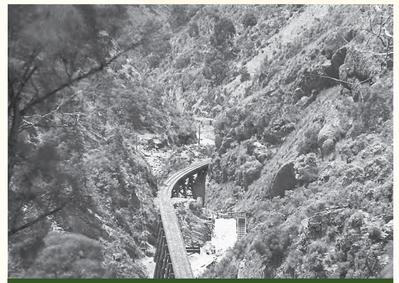
The reconstruction of the Walhalla Goldfields Railway between 1992 and 2002 was partially facilitated by the use of modern equipment to assist the work, such as the use of large cranes to remove the Thomson River bridge beams in one weekend for restoration at Morwell. In order to preserve the design heritage, the rebuilding effort specifically returned as much as possible of the remaining artefacts back into service. This included reinstatement of collapsed sections of drystone walling, restoration and re-use of remaining original bridge beams from the remaining structures.

A century after opening of the original line, the revived Walhalla Goldfields Railway has brought back to life the engineering achievements so carefully undertaken by the Victorian Railways.

Thomson River bridge under construction



Walhalla Station yard
Taken late 1910/early 1911. Note the station building is under construction and passenger cars are being used as scaffolding. Also note what appears to be Latrobe Valley coal in the goods wagon at the right. This was used by the Long Tunnel Mine as an adjunct to local timber after opening of the railway.



Bridges #6 [closet] and #5 looking towards Walhalla

Stringers Creek
Garratt loco No. G42 hauling a Walhalla-bound train, looks like early 1930s. This loco has been fully restored and now is regularly used at Puffing Billy.

From the cab

Stringers Gorge trestle
Bridge 6 - WH Lee photo.

Fowler in Stringers Gorge
This is Bridge 6, also known as the 'Boatbelly Bridge' because of the curved girders that were recycled from Victoria's North east.

For more information, please scan this QR code or visit **engineersaustralia.org.au/engineering-heritage-australia**

Photographs provided by Nick Anchen